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SUBJECT: GERMANY'S ISLAM CONFERENCE: WATCHING SAUSAGE BEING
MADE

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Classified By: Political M/C John Baunman for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (U) Summary: The second plenary meeting of the Interior Ministry's Islam Conference took place May 2. The Conference has yet to deliver much concrete progress on substantive issues, but can claim the increased public attention to Muslim integration as a major success. It is also mired in a debate about who can legitimately represent the diverse Muslim communities in Germany in negotiations with the German government about the role of Islam in society. On the core German government demand that Muslims accept German social values, there is no consensus among Muslims. Participants, however, remain committed to the process and expect progress in the long-run. End summary.

Critics Decry Slow Progress

[2](#). (U) Apart from consensus agreement that Islamic instruction should be offered in schools (as is Christian instruction) and a broad brush agreement that everyone living in Germany is obliged to respect the constitutional order, there was scant progress on the important issues that led to the founding of the Conference in the first place: the acceptance of German social values, such as equal treatment of women -- as demonstrated by policies on headscarves and girls' participation in athletic and other school activities -- and German language requirements for immigrants. Participants, particularly those from religious organizations, tended to be critical of the lack of substantive progress; Ayyub Axel Koehler of the Central Council of Muslims said that "this cannot go on this way, pointlessly debating issues."

[3](#). (C) Ali Aslan (protect), Islam Advisor at the Interior Ministry and a central organizer of the Conference, admitted that "no concrete results have been offered so far," but added that Germany "could not undo 40 years of negligent immigration policy in seven months." The Conference's most important successes, according to Aslan, are the growing public recognition that Muslims are a permanent part of Germany and the intense debate among the Muslim communities about their values, roles, and representation in Germany.

[4](#). (C) Comment: Despite problems and the criticism, we see no real movement by either secular or religious Muslims at this stage to quit the Conference. Social critic Necla Kelek told Poloffs that she thinks a focus on concrete achievements now is a mistake. She claims that the Conference's most important role now is to reveal the (in her view) insidious agenda of the religious groups, ensure that debate remains lively, and thereby energize the majority community and secular Muslims to confront and confound the religious

conservatives. Our contacts with the religious groups also recognize that they cannot expect overnight recognition and that participation in the Conference still holds out the possibility of real benefits. End comment.

Mired in the Representation Issue

15. (U) In response to a long-standing German government desire to negotiate with a single Muslim umbrella organization, the four largest religious organizations have formed the Muslim Coordination Council (KRM) (reftels). Instead of solving the representation problem, the KRM has been sharply criticized, both by secular Muslims as well as the German government. Secular Muslims, by and large, do not believe that the KRM, a conglomeration of more-or-less conservative religious organizations, represents their views.

Interior Minister Schaeuble argues that while the founding of the KRM is a step forward, it represents only 10 to 15 percent of Muslims in Germany, and cannot therefore be considered a legitimate spokesman for all Muslim communities.

The KRM counters that it represents 80 to 85 percent of all mosques in Germany, and therefore is a legitimate spokesman for religious or observant Muslims. In exchange for having fulfilled, in their view, the German government's request to form an umbrella organization, the KRM expected to have been conferred the status of official negotiating partner.

Interior Ministry: "It's About Integration, Not Religion"

16. (C) The KRM's demands illustrate that it sees the Conference primarily as being about religion. According to Aslan, however, the Conference is not about settling

BERLIN 00000955 002 OF 002

theo-cultural issues, but rather about integrating both religious and secular Muslims into German society. For precisely this reason, the Interior Ministry does not view the KRM -- a conservative religious group -- as a legitimate representative of the majority secular Muslims in Germany, and therefore, a legitimate negotiating partner on behalf of all Muslims. When asked why, if the Conference is about integration and not religion, the Conference could not simply be rolled up into the Chancellery's similar Integration Summit process, Aslan replied that the Interior Ministry is leading the Islam Conference because of special security concerns regarding Muslims stemming from 9/11 and the autumn 2005 French riots.

17. (C) In addition to having its own legitimacy questioned, the KRM continued to question the legitimacy of secular Conference participants of Muslim origin who have been critical of the religion's stance on women and other practices. In the view of the KRM, such critics of Islam have no legitimacy to represent religious views in negotiations with the government. Note: The Interior Ministry, since the inception of the Islam Conference, has made concerted efforts to include secular/cultural Muslims, and at least one person, Necla Kelek, who is antagonistic toward the religion. Interior's purpose has been to promote voices who are much more likely to accept German constitutional and social values. End note.

Battlefield for Social Values: Co-ed Swim Lessons

18. (U) The central issue in the Muslim integration debate, of course, is whether Muslims will adapt to German social values or Germans will accommodate Muslim traditional values.

Government officials such as Schaeuble and Maria Boehmer, the Federal Chancellery's Commissioner for Integration, have insisted that German values drawn from the constitution are not negotiable. The KRM is fighting to retain its view of traditional Muslim values, some aspects of which clash with conventional German practice, such as those involving male

and female roles in society. This tension is playing itself out in what would ordinarily be minor topics -- such as co-ed swim lessons -- that have become greatly magnified because of their utility as placeholders in the values debate. Secular Muslims tend to agree with Boehmer and others in government that Muslim girls must participate in swim lessons with boys, but some conservative Muslims such as Aiman Mazyek, General Secretary of the Central Council of Muslims, vowed to

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"protect the right of Muslim parents to withhold their daughters" from co-ed swim lessons. More generally, Mayzek also reportedly rejected a proposal from the majority in the Conference's working group on social values that endorsed core German values.

Breaking the Logjam: The Critical Role of Minister Schaeuble

19. (U) Comment: Schaeuble, perhaps unfairly, is often criticized by Muslims for allegedly fostering an air of "general suspicion" of Muslims by virtue of his ministry's monitoring of Muslim groups and his party's heavy demands on immigrants. Although he has made missteps that have alienated Muslims, such as once calling the rapidly increasing number of German converts to Islam "somewhat alarming," he has generally been a great supporter of Muslim integration. It was his inspiration to host the Islam Conference, and it will require further inspiration on his part to break the logjam. End comment.

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